

LVII.—*The Birds of Ireland.* By WM. THOMPSON, Esq.,
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[Continued from p. 430.]

No. 10.—*Corvidæ (continued); Picidæ; Certhiadae.*

THE ROOK, *Corvus frugilegus*, Linn., is as common throughout the cultivated and wooded parts of Ireland as in any other country*. It is generally looked upon by the farmer as an arch enemy, of which he has ocular demonstration,—“the evil that it does” being very apparent in the headless stalks of grain, while its virtues do not in a direct manner come under his cognizance. I have always been disposed to regard the rook as a bird intended by its CREATOR to check the unwonted increase of the insects most destructive to the vegetation of the field, and keep them within due bounds: both England and the continent furnish us with instances of the almost total destruction of crops in particular districts, consequent on its extirpation.

The good done by this bird is generally admitted by our authors who have written within the last sixty years, greatly to exceed the evil it commits. The only exception to this which I have met with is Sir Wm. Jardine, who speaks of the good as “at least compensating for their destruction or injury to the produce of the fields.” It may be possible that in particular localities the “Dr.” and “Cr.” account will about balance. A gentleman whose extensive farm is situated in the valley of the Lagan, and little more than a mile distant from three extensive rookeries (his place forming, as it were, the centre of the circle), once remarked to me, that he would rather than ten pounds a year that rooks never alighted on his fields. His charges against them comprise about the sum total of the evil propensities of the species. They are as follow:—“When the blade of wheat just shows itself above ground, and the pickle of grain is by frost or otherwise rendered accessible, these birds at daybreak pick it off; when grain is lodged they utterly destroy it, and do serious damage to it when in stooks, not only by eating it, but by carrying away heads of the grain, which are found scattered about the adjacent fields. The potatoe crop too they injure, by picking up the planted ‘sets’ in spring whenever accessible, as likewise in autumn the young potatoes; but only where the crop is thin and poor, as from such bare spots they can have a look-out against approaching enemies: where the foliage is luxuriant they never alight. They sometimes too have attacked the cherries in the garden †.”

* At the more genial period of the year, flocks of rooks occasionally visit the mountain pastures about Belfast.

† Mr. Jesse, who in his ‘Gleanings of Natural History’ treats most agreeably of rooks generally, and particularly of the *Royal* rookeries, remarks, that these birds are “sad depredators on my cherry-trees, attacking them early in the morning and carrying off great quantities.” He is nevertheless satisfied that the good done by the species greatly counterbalances the evil.

The only good here attributed to them is in "picking the grubs off lay ground, when broken up and harrowed." That where very numerous they do much of the harm here alleged is undoubted; but to prove that they do much more good than is imagined, I requested to be allowed to examine any slaughtered birds, that by exhibiting the food they contained, my friend might be convinced of the evil of his ways in destroying them; but though promised they were never sent. The propriety of having boys to guard the lately-sown wheat under the circumstances mentioned, where the depredations are perhaps the most serious, was suggested, but the very early hour was said to be an insuperable obstacle. They could however be watched* and frightened away by boys at this time, and when the grain is lodged, at a trifling expense, and then very little harm indeed would be done by them. One of the inimitable tail-pieces to Bewick's Birds (ed. 1832, vol. i. p. 93) points to the inutility of one kind of scarecrow, where a rook is represented peering curiously, but without the least fear, at the wretched effigy of humanity erected to frighten the species from its vicinity. Every person may have observed similar instances. The most notable that has come under my own observation, was where, in a newly-planted potatoe-field, a host of these birds were feeding, while among them hung four of their brethren gibbeted, and looking so fresh, that they had apparently been killed only two or three days before†.

By Wm. Sinclair, Esq., of Milltown, near Belfast, I am informed, that towards the end of autumn, when the harvest has been gathered in, numbers of rooks have, for the last dozen years or more, come every morning, for about a fortnight, to the pine-trees (*Pinus sylvestris*) in that district, for the sake of the cones, which they pluck from the branches and carry away. When the cones cannot be detached in the ordinary manner, they seize them in their bills, and launch off from the branch into the air, that the weight of their bodies may detach them. This is their common procedure with unyielding cones, and has been witnessed with much interest from the windows of my friend's house, within a few yards of which are some pines, in which this ingenious feat is regularly practised. The rook being an especial favourite with me on account of the benefit it does mankind, I was much gratified to learn this proof of its intelligence, which raises it to an equality with the gray crow (as evinced by its rising into the air with shell-fish and dropping them on the rocks to break them), and proves it to be not unworthy, on the score of intellect, of being placed in the same family group with the raven. What they do with the cones has not been ascertained. It would seem to me, that unless the scales of the cone be so widely open that

* In his 'Familiar History of Birds,' the Bishop of Norwich fairly weighs the good and harm done by rooks, and is convinced that the former greatly preponderates. He suggests this watching, as Sir Wm. Jardine, likewise, has subsequently done.

† A friend who kept three eagles procured rooks enough on which to feed them in summer, as these birds came to regale themselves at the troughs containing pig's-meat, of which potatoes formed the principal part.

the seed is ready to drop out, they could hardly reach it, and even then a portion only would be accessible; the scales themselves could not, I conceive, be detached, unless they were partially decomposed; unfortunately, the proceedings of the birds, subsequent to their carrying off the cones, have not been watched*.

Great meetings of rooks, before the breeding season commences, have been alluded to by authors, some of whom consider that the object is to settle preliminaries respecting that important period—of the correctness of this idea I have little doubt. These assemblages are sometimes long continued. During four weeks in the year 1837—from January 21st to February 17th—whenever I happened to ride between two and three o'clock in the direction of two rookeries, I always saw, at a place intermediate between them, and about a mile distant from each, extraordinary numbers, amounting certainly to several thousands; more than I conceive the two rookeries could furnish—a third rookery, about a mile and a half distant, must, I imagine, have likewise contributed its numbers. Although they closely covered fields of all kinds (pasture, meadow-land and ploughed ground), they were not congregated for the purpose of feeding, not more perhaps than one in a hundred being ever so engaged. Again they would be all on wing at such a height as to look no larger than swallows, and keeping within as limited a space in the air as they had occupied on the earth.

As remarked by Mr. Macgillivray, rooks “seem to calculate upon the protection which they usually receive in the neighbourhood of their breeding-places.” Here it is highly interesting to observe them become fellow-labourers with man when the plough is at work, closely following its track to consume the destructive insect larvæ which are turned up; thus performing an important office that the lords of creation could not accomplish for themselves. At such times too, as if conscious of the good in which they are engaged, they admit of a near approach, and their finely polished plumage has a beautiful effect as it glances like burnished metal in the sun. Their time of roosting varies a little, according to the afternoon being bright or gloomy. On the 10th of August 1837, I remarked a great number busily employed in feeding at some distance from the rookery so late as seven o'clock in the evening: the day throughout had been dull and dark.

I was informed by Richard Langtry, Esq., in the spring of 1831,

* Mr. Blackwall, in his ‘*Researches in Zoology*’ (p. 156), remarks, that “rooks in the autumn frequently bury acorns in the earth, probably with the intention of having recourse to them when their wants are more urgent.” It is added, that they sometimes forget where they have concealed them. Mr. Jesse too states, that these birds “are known to bury acorns, and I believe walnuts also, as I have observed them taking ripe walnuts from a tree, and returning to it before they could have had time to break them and eat the contents. Indeed, when we consider how hard the shell of a walnut is, it is not easy to guess how the rook contrives to break them. May they not, by first burying them, soften the shells, and afterwards return to feed upon them?” (Gleanings in Nat. Hist., 1st series.)

that a pair of herons built their nest in the rookery at Dromedaragh (county of Antrim), that the rooks tore the first nest to pieces, but that the herons eventually succeeded, and reared their brood in safety. A few years before that time about one hundred and fifty young rooks had been killed there during a storm, by being blown out of the nests. Among adult birds, there was an extraordinary fatality in the county of Westmeath on the night of the great hurricane of January 7th, 1839. As was noticed in a communication to the *Annals**, my friend Mr. R. Ball was assured by Dean Vignolles, on whose property the circumstance occurred, that the amazing number of 33,000 † were picked up dead on the shores of a lake some miles in length, and with extensive rookeries on its borders. So remarkably numerous were the dead bodies, that as a matter of curiosity they were reckoned by some boys as they gathered them into heaps. Dean Vignolles likewise submitted to Mr. Ball's inspection a more than ordinarily strong panel of a new window shutter, which was driven in and split by a rook being dashed against it on the night in question—the innocent cause of the damage was found dead between the window and the shutter inside the room. Other fatalities occasionally befall the rook. In the autumn of 1831 (?) there was a dense fog over Lough Neagh and its neighbourhood for two nights and an entire day, during which time great numbers of these birds perished in its waters, and were afterwards washed ashore. I have been told that a similar circumstance occurred in the harbour of Cove in the south of Ireland some years ago.

At Redhall, county of Antrim, a friend once saw a brood of four young rooks, all of which were white : both parents were of the ordinary sable hue. J. V. Stewart, Esq. of Rockhill, near Letterkenny, informs me that he possesses two varieties of the rook, one entirely of a dingy brown colour, and having a diseased appearance ; and the other with two white bars across the wings, the rest of the plumage being of the usual colour. In the year 1839 I was told by Mr. G. J. Allman of Bandon, that several light fawn-coloured birds of this species were shot near to that town a few years before, some of which he had seen in company with other rooks, that freely associated with them.

In Scotland these birds have, by suiting themselves to circumstances, come under my observation in a manner in which they have not done in Ireland. I have for many miles along the coast of Ayrshire met with them in the autumn, feeding among the fresh seaweed or rejectamenta of the preceding tide ; and at other times they were crowded seeking for food among the heaps of sea-weed collect-

* ' Note on the Effects of the Hurricane of January 7, 1839, in Ireland, on some Birds, Fishes, &c.' vol. iii. p. 182.

† Were a figure taken off the above number, it would be reduced to what I have remarked to constitute a respectable rookery. Mr. Jesse too states that " the average number of rooks' nests, during the last four years, in the avenue of Hampton Court Park, has been about 750 ; allowing three young birds and a pair of old ones to each nest, the number would amount to 3750."—*Gleanings*, p. 65, 1st Ed.

ed on the beach for manure. About two miles inland from Ballantrae, in Ayrshire, a few hundreds of these birds, in the autumn of 1839, regularly roosted on the ground upon a rising knoll in a pasture-field. I first saw them there at eight o'clock P.M. on the 20th of August; and afterwards, on returning late from grouse-shooting in distant moors, they were always to be seen. This roosting-place was in the midst of a cultivated district, in which there was no wood of sufficient age to be patronized by the rook. At the commencement of a snow-storm in England, and after the ground became well covered, I was once amused at seeing a rook rolling in the snow, apparently enjoying itself as much as a Newfoundland dog could have done*. In summer I have met with the rook in Holland, France and Switzerland, and in some parts of the first-named country observed that it was as common as in its chief haunts in the British Islands. At the Hotel Bellevue, which is situated close to the king's park at the Hague, I for the first time experienced the evils of a rookery, the cawing from a closely adjacent one being so incessant from daybreak as to drive all sleep from me, unaccustomed as I was to such music;—this was at the end of May, when the calls of the young are almost constantly uttered.

The rook has attracted the attention of authors possessing a celebrity of a very different kind. In the 'Bracebridge Hall' of Washington Irving, an admirable chapter is devoted to it. Goldsmith gives a very interesting account of its nestling in the Temple Gardens, London, as observed by himself. A most graphic description of its manner of life about Selborne is furnished by White. Sir Wm. Jardine introduces it in a picturesque manner as an adjunct to the scenery of the park; and Mr. Macgillivray, as if conceiving that the subject had already been quite exhausted, imparts a new feature to the history of the bird, by visiting a rookery at night, and relating the proceedings at that period.

THE JACKDAW, *Corvus Monedula*, Linn., is found throughout the island, especially where the labour of man is evinced by buildings, the plantation of trees, and the cultivation of the ground. But it is much more interesting to meet with this bird in its more wild and natural abode in the bold and precipitous cliffs which it frequents, whether inland or marine.

The basaltic precipices of the north-east of Ireland are much resorted to by these birds, and I believe at all seasons—in the month of October, in different years, I have observed them at the approach of evening to gather in as great numbers as in summer, to roost in the rocks at the Cavehill, near Belfast. In the wild peninsula of the Horn (co. Donegal) they breed in the marine cliffs, and according to the late T. F. Neligan, Esq., of Tralee, they nestle in caverns in very small islands about three miles distant from the coast of Kerry. On the 29th of May, 1836, I saw many jackdaws at the sandy pre-

* Waterton in his 'Essays on Natural History' mentions a tame raven acting similarly.

cipitous cliffs rising above the beach of Lough Neagh, at Massareene deer-park, where they breed in holes, all of which were stated by the gamekeeper to be the deserted burrows of rabbits.

Church towers* and steeples, chimnies†, and occasionally trees, are their ordinary nestling-places. They are generally described as late breeding birds; but a most accurate observer furnishes me with notes to the effect that on the 2nd of March he had seen them carrying building materials to a chimney in Belfast; and to other chimnies in the same town he on the 20th of that month, and on the 7th of April, saw them carrying food, as he conceived, for their young. The first foray of certain country jackdaws, in the early morning, is to the town, where they are very punctual in making their appearance: on the 11th of June I once noted the precise time of their appearance to be 45 minutes past 3 o'clock. Here they are quite innocuous; but in the country, it must be confessed, they occasionally levy contributions. Montagu has remarked that they are "fond of cherries," to the truth of which more than one of my friends' gardens about Belfast, had they not "poor dumb mouths," could bear testimony. Of all birds they are the most destructive to this fruit. A friend on one occasion coming upon a number regaling in one of his cherry-trees, fired at them, without reflecting on the damage he must necessarily do to the tree, and five fell dead to the ground; here they and other species, particularly blackbirds (*Turdus Merula*), for some years entirely consumed the crop of cherries on a number of fine and tall standard trees which could not conveniently be netted, and in consequence of their depredations the trees were all cut down. The cherry-trees in the garden of another friend, resident in the neighbourhood of Belfast, were sacrificed for a similar reason. In a district well known to me, jackdaws generally associate with rooks, and hence participate both in the good and evil done by these birds to the farm; though, as mentioned in treating of the rook, the former greatly preponderates. In a wild and uncultivated district on the northern coast of the island, I have in summer remarked flocks of these birds feeding on the sea-shore between tide-marks, and among *fucus*-covered stones.

The sites chosen by the jackdaw for perching are frequently amusing; thus I have observed five of them, in flying to a vane, alight with the most correct regularity on the letters N. E. W. S., while the other surmounted the ball, and thus would they remain stationed for some time, looking as if they were "part and parcel" of the weathercock. On the head of Nelson, as he stands erect in all his majesty on the top of the pillar which bears his name in

* In the tower of a country church near Belfast, jackdaws had in the course of time accumulated such quantities of sticks, that cart-loads of them had to be removed before some repairs on the building could be commenced.

† The burning of Shanes Castle (the mansion of Earl O'Neil, situated on the borders of Lough Neagh), which happened about twenty years ago, was said to have been caused by the dry sticks forming the nests of jackdaws in one of the chimnies having caught fire. [The last fire at York Minster has been attributed to the same cause.—Ed.]

Sackville Street, Dublin, I have seen the jackdaw alight, and impart an air of the ludicrous to the hero of Trafalgar. But under similar circumstances, this bird would not scruple to perch even

“ On the bald first Cæsar’s head*.”

Three jackdaws, entirely white, were reared in a chimney in Belfast a few years ago, and about the same time two of a similar colour were brought up in a demesne in the neighbourhood; here they were observed by a friend associating, both in feeding and on wing, with their sable brethren, who acknowledged them as kindred. On account of their colour, they were unfortunately persecuted to the death, when they proved to be perfect albinos, the bill and legs, as well as the plumage, being white; their hoary moustaches gave them a most venerable appearance, though in reality they were birds of the year.

On the 29th June 1835, I saw many jackdaws about the fissures of the lofty chalk-cliffs rising above the river Derwent, near Matlock in Derbyshire, where it was presumed they nestled, and the next evening heard their call there so late as ten o’clock, which tended to confirm the conjecture. In the Morea and the Archipelago, late in the spring and in the summer of 1841, I observed jackdaws equally numerous, and in localities similar to those at home, such as about the ruins of the old castle at Patras, the high western cliffs of the island of Sphacteria (the scene of Byron’s *Cor-sair*), and on a rocky islet, lying to the north-east of the entrance to Port Nousa, in the island of Paros.

THE MAGPIE, *Corvus Pica*, Linn., has long been common throughout the island, but, according to several authors, was unknown down to a certain period. Smith, in his ‘*History of the county of Cork*,’ published in 1749, remarks, that it “was not known in Ireland seventy years ago, but is now very common;” and Rutt, in his ‘*Natural History of Dublin*,’ observes, that “it is a foreigner, naturalized here since the latter end of King James the Second’s reign, and is said to have been driven hither by a strong wind.” (!) Dean Swift thus alludes to it in his ‘*Journal to Stella*’:—“Pray observe the inhabitants about Wexford; they are old English; see what they have particular in their manners, name and language. Magpies have been always there, and nowhere else

* The following note is contributed by my friend Mr. R. Patterson of Belfast:—“I remember some years ago my uncle, John Fowler, Esq., of the bank of Ireland, had a pet jackdaw, which answered to the name of Jack, and was regularly in the habit of performing a feat, which might baffle many a person who talks about ‘the centre of gravity.’ When Mr. Fowler after dinner had mixed his ‘tumbler’ of punch, and called ‘Jack,’ the bird instantly came, and perched on the edge of the glass, where he poised himself so nicely that it was never upset. I believe that, on such occasions, he used to get from his master a bit of white sugar, which he ate while thus resting on the tumbler.”

in Ireland*, till of late years." To a commentary on this by Mr. Ogilby, published in Yarrell's 'British Birds' (vol. ii. pp. 111, 112), the reader is referred. In the Irish Statutes, 17 Geo. II. ch. 10, a reward is offered for magpies, along with other "four- and two-footed vermin †."

That this bird has, like other species, increased and multiplied to a goodly extent in Ireland, appears from the following circumstance. In September 1836, I was informed by the intelligent and trustworthy gamekeeper at Tollymore Park (co. Down), the seat of the Earl of Roden, that by ranging the country for many miles around the park, he, by robbing their nests, shooting and trapping them, destroyed in one half year 732 birds and eggs. At the assizes held in the spring and autumn of every year he "presented" for vermin killed, and on the occasion in question received 12*l.* for magpies, &c. So long as a reward was offered for their heads, he killed immense numbers of these birds—it was discontinued two or three years previous to 1836. In extensive districts in the north of Ireland, where the farms are small, and every cottage possesses a few sheltering trees, the magpie's nest is a certain accompaniment; and the trees being generally the open-topped ash, the dark ball of the nest is visible from so great a distance, that I have often reckoned a considerable number from one point of view. The magpie builds rather early, and in all kinds of trees, none being greater favourites than fine old hawthorns: the eggs not uncommonly amount to seven in number. In a note on the margin of the copy of Montagu's 'Ornithological Dictionary' which belonged to the late Mr. John Montgomery, of Locust Lodge near Belfast, an accurate observer, it is stated, that "when angry or alarmed for the safety of its young, the

* Derricke, who wrote his 'Image of Ireland' in Queen Elizabeth's time, says—

" No pies to pluck the thatch from house
Are breed in Irishe grounde,
But worse than pies, the same to burne
A thousande maie be founde."

Letter xxvi. vol. ii. p. 309, 2nd edit.

† The following notice of the magpie appears in the lately published 'Tracts relating to Ireland,' printed for the Irish Archæological Society, vol. i. In 'A brife Description of Ireland, made in this yeere 1589, by Robert Payne,' it is remarked—"There is neither mol, *pye*, nor carren crow." In a note to this, contributed by Dr. Aquila Smith of Dublin, it is observed, "As to the magpie (*Pica caudata*) our author is probably correct, for Derricke, who wrote in 1581, in his 'Image of Ireland,' says—[—the four lines above quoted are introduced here.] 'Ireland,' says Moryson, in 1617, 'hath neither singing nightingall, nor *chattering pye*, nor undermining moule.' Itinerary, part iii. b. iii. p. 160. [The extract elsewhere given from Smith's 'Cork' appears here.] The earliest notice of this bird as indigenous in Ireland is in Keogh's 'Zoologia Medicinalis Hibernica,' Dublin, 8vo, 1739: he merely mentions the 'magpie or pianet, *Hib. Maggidipye*.' This evidently Anglo-Irish word, for we have no name for it in the ancient Irish language, favours the opinion held by our best-informed naturalists, that this bird is of recent introduction into this country."

magpie is not only very clamorous, but pecks the branch on which it rests, violently tearing the bark off in its rage." On the 9th of May, I once saw a gray crow attack the nest of a magpie, when the latter, "single-handed," boldly repulsed and drove it off to some little distance. The crow nevertheless returned to the nest several times, but was always beaten off without effecting its evil purpose. Bold as the magpie is in defence of its own, I have more than once seen it beaten away by a pair of missel-thrushes (*Turdus viscivorus*) from the vicinity of their nest.

It has been often observed, that if one of a pair of magpies having a nest be shot, another mate is soon found, the period, according to Mr. Selby, "sometimes scarcely exceeding a day;" but a gentleman of my acquaintance assures me, that on his shooting one of a pair of these birds in the forenoon, the survivor had found another partner before evening. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of widowed magpies becoming provided with new partners is that recorded by the celebrated Dr. Jenner in the Philosophical Transactions for 1824 (p. 21). These birds are often so far gregarious as to frequent particular groves near their feeding-ground for roosting, in considerable numbers, and to which they resort in straggling flocks: I have thus reckoned twenty-six on wing together, when the distance between the first and last resembled that in an ill-matched pack of hounds during the chase. November 20, 1838, was a dull, dark, true November day throughout, and so early as half-past two o'clock P.M., I saw a number of these birds that had evidently retired to roost for the night; so many as about twenty of them, which on being alarmed by me flew from a fine old willow on the banks of the Lagan, looked very beautiful as they rose together.

Magpies are very generally persecuted with us on account of their evil propensities. One friend complains that his garden has suffered much from their depredations on cherries and other fruit; another that the eggs of game, &c. are greatly destroyed by them;—their propensity for eggs is taken advantage of for their destruction, and they become victims to the trap baited with those of our domestic fowl. Grain, too, they certainly consume, but their numbers are not anywhere so great as to do much injury in this respect. That they do a great deal of good, I have had abundant and positive evidence from an examination of the contents of their stomachs (supplied me by bird-preservers) at various times, but particularly in winter, when almost every one contained insects (chiefly *Coleoptera*), or the remains of mice and slugs—of the last, the internal shell (*Limacellus*, Brard.) only remained—mixed with these occasionally appeared oats and other grain. In winter, the magpie, as well as others of the *Corvidæ*, is of great service to the public, by resorting in numbers to such meadows as are manured with the offensive refuse of the slaughter-house, and feeding on the titbits*! By George Mathews,

* Since writing my account of the magpie, I find that this and several other particulars dwelt upon are much better treated of by Mr. Waterton in his 'Essays on Natural History.' His description of the bird throughout is excellent.

Esq., I have been informed that a trustworthy warrener at Springvale, county of Down (the seat of his grandfather Major Mathews), assured him, that he once saw a magpie fly some distance out to sea with a stoat or weasel fastened to it, and that he and some other men launched a boat, and followed to see the issue; when they found the magpie lying dead upon the water. The quadruped had disappeared, and they conjectured had been drowned; but Mr. Mathews thinks that it may rather have made its way ashore, as he has often seen these animals swim admirably. Montagu, in the 'Supplement to his Ornithological Dictionary,' mentions his having been witness to a weasel killing a carrion crow, the latter being in the first instance the aggressor.

Magpies are so bold, as apparently, through mere wantonness, to persecute birds that would seem to be more than a match for them: the beautiful kestrel or windhover they occasionally annoy. Towards the peregrine falcon they dare hardly show any impertinence, but the curiosity which I once saw exhibited by a pair of them towards a bird of this species was highly amusing. A trained falcon belonging to my relative Richard Langtry, Esq., on being given its liberty, after taking a few circuits through the air, alighted in a small tree, where first one, and then another magpie likewise alighted, without exhibiting the least fear, but with the intention only, to all appearance, of examining it more closely. They gradually approached the hawk until almost touching it; one indeed seemed to strike it, and immediately after they both flew to a tree close by, and commenced an incessant chattering, which was continued for some time, and which a spectator could not have believed to be anything short of a discussion upon the merits of the stranger bird. When in the tree with the hawk, they maintained a respectful silence. At the same place, a tame magpie and a sheep of a peculiar variety, whose fleece hung nearly to the ground, were great friends, and generally associated together. The favourite perch of the bird was on the sheep's back, and this animal became innocently a receiver of stolen goods, as the magpie concealed its pilferings in the thick wool of its back. It sometimes hopped after the sheep, picking at its heels; and, whether through mischief, or manifesting a natural carnivorous propensity, was very partial to pecking at the bare heels of beggars who came about the house, excessively to their annoyance. Here, also, two magpies were proficient in talking. One, without any teaching, learnt all the phrases of a parrot kept in a neighbouring cage*, and the other was taught several words and short sentences, by their being repeated to it by its master; perhaps

* It would seem that, in a wild state also, either this species or a nearly allied one will imitate the notes of other birds. Mr. Nuttall, who, from a knowledge of the bird both in Europe and America, considers the common magpie of the two continents identical, remarks—"I one day observed a small flock, and among the fraternity heard one chattering familiarly in the varied tone of the cat-bird, as he sat on a bough by the water, where birds might become his prey."—Audubon's Ornithological Biography, vol. iv. p. 409.

the most comical of these was "pretty-poll," as passing strangers, on hearing the well-known words, turned round to look at the supposed parrot, and saw only impudent "mag" instead. But anything more on this subject would be only taking a leaf out of the history of a pet magpie communicated by my friend Mr. Stevelly, Professor of Natural Philosophy in Belfast College. He remarks—

"When a boy I succeeded in rearing a magpie from a very young bird; he became much attached to me, and long before he could fly would follow me about with a curious kind of sideling hop, and even at this time of life began to show great archness, running after the peasant children, who, in the south of Ireland, go for the most part without shoes and stockings, and pecking at their bare heels; and then instantly looking up to see if punishment were meditated, of which, if he saw the least symptom, he would escape with wonderful celerity. He became so adroit at length at this amusement, that the children who came near the house were much afraid of him; when his beak became stronger, he also attacked dogs in the same manner, but always with much and very droll caution. He flew well and strongly before I attempted to confine him in the slightest degree, and roamed at large round my father's place; but when I wished him to come home in the evening, one or two loud calls of his name 'Jack' were sure to bring him from some neighbouring high tree on which he had perched, to my shoulder, which was a very favourite resting-place; when there, it was a favourite practice of his gently to run his beak between my lips or into my ear, with that peculiar motion which pigeons are observed to use when they caress each other; the tickling sensation which this process caused when my ear was in question made me always submit with difficulty, and I was frequently obliged to withdraw my head suddenly with a shudder; at this he always seemed highly delighted, and used to chatter with a guttural sound not unlike Irish words.

"The country people in the south of Ireland have a manner of calling each other from a distance by bending their fore-finger, putting it into their mouth, and producing a very loud and shrill whistle. This whistle 'Jack' became very expert at imitating, and it was a favourite amusement of his to sit on a very hot day on the top of the house, and if he chanced to espy any person at a distance, as, for example, the market-boy riding into town, a whistle from Jack, repeated if necessary, was sure to bring him back, however great his hurry, under the impression that some important commission had been forgotten, or that his presence was required at the house or farm-yard; the length of the avenue, and a gentle slope in it at about a quarter of a mile distance from the house, rendered this trick very easy to be practised, and he seemed to take great delight in it when successful, and many a hearty curse he received from the wearied subject of his practical joke as soon as he had discovered the individual who had so importunately called him back.

"He was particularly fond of any shining article, such as spoons and trinkets; these he frequently stole, and we came upon his treasure-house in a laughable way. There was an old gentleman, a

great friend of my father, who resided with us almost continually. He was of a peculiarly studious disposition, but from a deformity in his person used generally to read standing, with his arms and breast resting on the back of a chair, and the book placed on a table before him; after having read for a while, it was his habit to take off his spectacles, lay them beside him, blow his nose, take a pinch of snuff, and after a few moments, pondering what he had been reading, resume the spectacles and proceed. One very warm day I lay reading at one end of a room in which there was an open glass door leading to the greenhouse; in this room the old gentleman was most intently pursuing his studies at a little distance from me. My attention was soon arrested by seeing the magpie perched upon the chair near him, eyeing him most intently and with a very arch expression, and at length, in an instant, he had with a most active hop touched the table, secured the red leather spectacle-case, and was out of the glass door with the most noiseless wing and with a very graceful motion. I remained quiet, resolved to see the end of the joke; after a few seconds' absence 'Jack' was again at his post, eyeing the old gentleman with a most inquisitive and yet business-like glance; it was nearly impossible to resist the ludicrous impression produced by the entire scene: at length off came the spectacles, and out came the pocket handkerchief and snuff-box; quick as thought Jack had invaded the table and was out of the open door with the prize, which I have no doubt had from the beginning been the object of his covetous admiration while they were on the nose of the old gentleman. This time the magpie did not return, either because he found it more difficult to reach his storehouse with the spectacles than with the case, or because, having gained the object of his ambition, he conceived his presence no longer necessary. At length the period of rumination having elapsed, the old gentleman set about replacing the spectacles; as soon as his surprise had abated at not finding them with his hands beside him on the table, he removed the chair and groped about on the carpet, then raised the book and examined every part of the table. Not being able to restrain myself any longer, I exploded in laughter; and of course I was instantly suspected of playing off a practical joke, and charged with taking the spectacles, but at length succeeded in convincing him I had never risen from the sofa on which I reclined; but after a good deal of laughing, and two or three other members of the family having been attracted to the room by the hubbub, I was compelled, under cross-examination, to own that I had witnessed 'Jack's' abstractions. The question then became serious how the articles were to be recovered; some person suggested to leave a teaspoon near him and watch him. This was accordingly done, but his motions were so rapid that he eluded us all, seeming at first to pop completely over the house; at length, by placing two or three persons in favourable positions, he was 'marked' in a leaden valley between a double part of the roof; and this having been closely searched, a deposit was discovered not only of the things which 'Jack' had that day carried off, but also of some articles which had been for some time supposed to be lost, but re-

specting which a breath of suspicion as to him had never been entertained. This day's successful foray led to his losing his entire store, no doubt in the midst of his triumphal rejoicing.

“ His thieving propensities seemed to gather strength from this period ; but I have little doubt many articles which were lost were set down to his account without sufficient evidence that he was the thief. A valuable brooch which belonged to a lady who was on a visit with my mother was at length lost, and every finger pointed to ‘ Jack ’ as the thief ; this charge acquired probability from the fact that he had on the previous day overturned and destroyed a very valuable writing-desk in her room while examining too anxiously some of the silver ornaments of its bottles ; an order was forthwith issued by my father that a cage must be made for him, and the absolute liberty he had heretofore enjoyed somewhat curtailed. I submitted the more cheerfully to this order as his flights from home were now becoming obviously longer, and on one or two occasions he had not returned all night ; and although at these times he made his appearance next morning hungry and cold and with a very rueful aspect, yet I was beginning to fear that he would at length acquire the habits necessary for shifting for himself, and stay away altogether. Accordingly he was caged ; at first he furiously attacked the wooden bars of the cage and broke some of them, but in places so scattered, that in no one place did he succeed in making a breach large enough for his exit. He pined very much at the confinement, and the beauty of his plumage was much deteriorated, so that I at length began to let him fly about : his delight on these occasions was excessive and often laughably expressed ; but his distress when again seized on to be returned to his cage was at least equally strongly expressed. He used to screech long and loudly, and resist with beak and talon ; hence he soon began when liberated to fly straight off and remain away for several hours. In one of these rambles, a woman returning from Cork was astonished to see him stand so tamely on the public road beside a small pond at which he occasionally drank ; she came near him and held out a herring towards him, which he very thankfully began to eat, when she secured him, cut one of his wings, and on reaching her home put him among some poultry, who beat him most unmercifully. It was four or five days before I was able to discover his prison, the woman living three or four miles off ; and when I did, and had paid a few shillings for his ransom, he came home in most piteous plight ; his spirit was quite broken, his plumage much injured and dingy, and except for the well-known ‘ Jack ’ and one or two other words, chiefly Irish, which he pronounced, I should have doubted or disbelieved his identity. I however pulled the feathers of his wings (which were mere stumps on one side), and by care he was beginning to recover his vivacity ; when, attempting to drink at a barrel, in which, when he could fly, he was in the habit of splashing, he fell in, and was drowned before his danger was discovered. I never felt so bereaved as upon the death of poor ‘ Jack.’ ”

At the performance of the Maid and the Magpie in Belfast Thea-

tre, on one occasion in my young days, a schoolfellow about fourteen years of age, who had not before been at any dramatic representation, was present. On seeing that the woman was about to be executed for the theft committed by the bird, he from the pit gallantly roared out at the top of his voice that she was innocent, for he had seen the magpie steal the spoons.—I well remember the laugh of the school being turned against him on the following morning.

This species rarely exhibits variety in its plumage: a white one frequented a demesne near Belfast for two or three years; and a friend once saw three pure white ones, which were brought from the neighbourhood to town for sale;—they had probably been reared in the same nest.

In the month of May last, I met with the magpie about Smyrna: over the greater part of the European continent it is common.

In their respective works on British Birds, Sir Wm. Jardine admirably points out the favourite haunts of the magpie; and Mr. Macgillivray gives a very characteristic description of its manners in a wild state.

THE JAY, *Garrulus glandarius*, Flem., can now be claimed as an indigenous bird by about the southern half of Ireland only.

Smith, in his 'History of the county of Waterford' (1745), says, "the jay is pretty common in our woods," and in his 'History of Cork' enumerates it among the birds of that county. Mr. R. Ball considers it to be now rare in that quarter: in the summer of 1837 he saw young birds which were taken from a nest near Youghal. Mr. G. J. Allman informed me in 1839, that the jay had of late, owing to its being protected, become common in Lord Bandon's park, in the last-named county. Mr. R. Davis, jun., of Clonmel, replied as follows to some queries in Feb. 1837:—"The jay must be indigenous: the oldest inhabitants remember them to be much more plentiful than they now are: they still breed in woods near us, but were formerly to be seen close to the town." About Portarlington (Queens-county) they are particularly numerous, and to go out there specially for jay-shooting is not an uncommon practice. About Portumna they are said to be met with, but not frequently. In Rutty's 'Natural History of Dublin,' the jay appears as one of the birds of that county, and as such it is known at present to Mr. R. Ball.

I am not aware of the existence of this bird either now, or for a long time past, in the north of the island, although there are many districts apparently well suited to its abode, and every year becoming more so from the increasing age of full-grown timber. Dubourdieu, in his 'Survey of the county of Antrim,' remarks—"The jay was much more frequent before the woods at Portmore were cut; it is still [1812] however to be met with about Shanes Castle, and other woods at the borders of the lake [Neagh]." I have been unable to verify its being there at so late a period. It must not be taken for granted that the bird called jay in the north of Ireland is the *Garrulus glandarius*, as that name is frequently bestowed on the

missel-thrush (*Turdus viscivorus**). The latest positive evidence known to me of the occurrence of the true jay in the quarter alluded to, is afforded by a venerable friend, who about sixty years ago received three young ones from a nest in Portmore park, on the borders of Lough Neagh, once rich in fine woods of oak, but which long since have fallen before the axe. In the Irish Statutes, 17th of George II., chap. 10, a reward is offered for the head of the jay, together with that of the magpie and others of the *Corvidæ*. Mr. Yarrell seems to imagine that it is to the numbers killed in consequence of this reward being offered, that the species generally became less numerous with us; but as the jay can, like the *Corvidæ*, for which a reward was at the same time offered, take very good care of itself, I should attribute its decrease to other and more natural causes. With reference to the distribution of this bird in Ireland, it is desirable to ascertain its distribution in Scotland. Sir Wm. Jardine observes, that "as we proceed northward it becomes much more local, though by no means rare, where it is found frequenting generally the older wood around private seats, and in parks, and some of the forests in the middle highlands. It is common both in Perth- and Argyleshire, but we are not sure that it extends to the forests of the far north †."

I have never met with this beautiful bird in a wild state in Ireland, but have had the gratification of seeing it in Scotland among the natural wood about the northern extremity of Loch Lomond, as well as about Coniston Water in Lancashire; and on the continent, in Switzerland and Italy—in the latter country, on the richly wooded banks of the Nera, not far from its confluence with the Tiber, and 14° to the south of the first-named locality ‡.

GREATER SPOTTED WOODPECKER, *Picus major*, Linn.—All that can be positively stated of woodpeckers as Irish birds, is, that the *P. major* has in a very few instances been met with.

Templeton records a specimen obtained in the county of Londonderry in August 1802, having been sent to Dr. M'Donnell of Belfast §; and a second having been met with since. An example

* This bird is correctly remarked by Dubourdieu to be "now frequent," so that the true jay is evidently the bird alluded to.

† Brit. Birds, vol. ii. p. 253.

‡ The nutcracker, *Nucifraga Caryocatactes*, Briss., cannot be announced with any certainty as having ever been met with in Ireland. Among the notes of Mr. Templeton is one to the effect that a bird of this species "had been shot at Silvermines, county of Tipperary, by Mr. J. Lewis." In the preparation of Mr. Templeton's 'Catalogue of the Vertebrate Animals of Ireland' (published in the 'Magazine of Natural History,' vol. i. New Series) by his son, the nutcracker was omitted in consequence of the latter gentleman being unaware of any further particulars.

§ Among Mr. Templeton's drawings is a beautiful coloured representation of this bird. I have only met with this species in its native haunts, in the richly wooded valley of Sarnen, Switzerland.

which I saw in the museum of the Royal Dublin Society in 1834, was stated by Mr. W. S. Wall, bird-preserved, to have been killed on the banks of the canal near the metropolis in December 1831, when another was seen in company with it. By a letter from Mr. R. Davis, jun., of Clonmel, dated Feb. 1837, I learned that, six years before that time, a *P. major* was shot at St. Johnstown, in the same county. To the fifth vol. of the 'Annals' I communicated the following note on the greater spotted woodpecker. "On Nov. 13, 1839, one of these birds was shot at Castlereagh, near Belfast, by Mr. Greenfield, who remarks that it was 'very tame,' and when fired at was engaged in pecking into a dead tree; it seemed to be unaccompanied by any of its species. It is a male bird, but not in adult plumage; and has been liberally presented by the gentleman just named to the Belfast Museum."

Smith, in his 'History of Cork,' remarks under "Hoopoe"—"Mr. Willoughby ranks it among the woodpeckers, of which I have not yet seen one in this county." In the same author's 'History of Waterford' there appears "*Picus Martis*, the woodpecker, a bird rare in this county:" can *P. martius* here be meant? Ruddy enumerates the "*Picus varius minor*, lesser spotted woodpecker," as one of the birds of the county of Dublin; and it likewise appears in Dr. Patrick Browne's 'Catalogue of the Birds of Ireland,' into which it was probably copied from Ruddy. All these notices of woodpeckers are very unsatisfactory*.

THE TREE CREEPER, *Certhia familiaris*, Linn., generally inhabits districts throughout Ireland in which old wood prevails, and is everywhere resident.

Owing to its habits, it is perhaps of all our native birds the least known, but to the ornithologist is particularly interesting, from being the only one of the zogodactyle birds indigenous to the island: its presence too throughout the winter is an additional attraction.

* I have been told that the green woodpecker is found in an old wood in the county of Donegal, but no proof was ever afforded:—when in Dublin some years ago, I saw in the possession of a bird-preserved a fresh example of this species, which was accordingly believed to have been shot in Ireland; but by inquiry from the owner, I learned that it had been sent him from England: other similar cases respecting the *Picus viridis* have occurred to me.

A recent specimen of the Nuthatch (*Sitta europæa*), sent to a bird-preserved in the metropolis, was on the same presumptive evidence as the green woodpecker mentioned to me as an Irish bird; but on inquiry it was found to have been killed in Wales. This species is not known to have ever visited the island.

Wryneck, *Yunx Torquilla*, Linn. There is no record of this species having ever been met with in Ireland. On the 29th of April last I saw one of them among some shrubby plants in the island of Sphacteria, which bounds the western side of the fine bay of Navarino. On the 25th of the same month, a wryneck which alighted in H.M.S. Beacon, when about sixty miles to the south-east of Calabria, was captured, as mentioned in the 'Annals,' vol. viii. p. 127.

In the woods of the counties Down, Antrim, and Fermanagh*, this bird has occurred to me. Mr. J. V. Stewart notices it as found in the north of the county of Donegal; Mr. R. Ball, as met with about Dublin and Youghal; to the Rev. Thomas Knox it is known as common in some parts of Westmeath, and about Killaloe; by Mr. R. Davis, jun., it is reported to be not uncommon in Tipperary; and that the species is common in Kerry, I was informed by the late Mr. T. F. Neligan. Such of these birds as have come under my observation, though apparently aware of my presence, never exhibited any shyness, but admitted of a near approach, when it was extremely interesting to observe the regular, quick, and business-like manner in which they searched for their food. Now one would appear moving in a straight line up the trunks of the largest pines, from near the base until it would almost reach the summit; then it would be seen ascending the next tree to which it flew, by spirally winding round it, the effect being much heightened by its breast, in contrast with the dark-coloured bark, appearing of a silvery whiteness. Mr. R. Ball has "known the creeper to be captured by boys getting to the opposite side of a tree at the base of which it commenced feeding, and making a random stroke with a cap or hat, at the place they supposed it had reached in its upward movement." This species is generally stated by authors to live entirely on insects; but the stomachs of the only two I have examined, contained each, in addition to such food, a few seeds of the common pine (*Pinus sylvestris*): the specimens were shot in the month of January. Wilson, in his 'American Ornithology,' mentions his having found the seeds of the pine-tree (of course a different species from *P. sylvestris*) in the stomachs of individuals killed in the United States, and likewise "fragments of a fungus that vegetates on old wood." Mr. Macgillivray gives a very full and graphic description of the creeper, 'Brit. Birds,' vol. iii.

[To be continued.]

PROCEEDINGS OF LEARNED SOCIETIES.

ROYAL SOCIETY.

Dec. 16, 1841, and Jan. 6, 1842.—A paper was read, entitled, "On Fibre," by Martin Barry, M.D., F.R.SS. Lond. and Edin.

The author observes, that, in the mature blood-corpuscle, there is often seen a flat filament, already formed within the corpuscle. In Mammalia, including Man, this filament is frequently annular; sometimes the ring is divided at a certain part, and sometimes one extremity overlaps the other. This is still more the case in Birds, Amphibia, and Fishes, in which the filament is of such length as to con-

* Here I have seen it close to the house at Florence Court; and a friend living near Belfast has observed this bird creeping up the yard-wall attached to his dwelling-house. There is in reality nothing remarkable in such cases: they are mentioned, as some persons imagine that the creeper never leaves the depth of woods.